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Editorial

Another month, another newsletter – if only a few days late this time. This edition contains longish articles on the Mayor's proposed Air Quality Strategy and How London Boroughs Work (i.e. how money is spent on transport issues and who decides on what it is spent). Note how the system is structured so there is little allocated to roads, while enormous amounts are spent on public transport schemes!

There is also an article on the aggressive enforcement of parking rules in Croydon by Peter Morgan. Something close to my heart as I recently fell victim to it.

If you have suffered similar experiences, why not send us an article on it for publication? Likewise any comments on the articles contained in the this issue would be welcome.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Mayor's Air Quality Strategy



The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has issued a draft Air Quality Strategy document. Responses are required by the 21st June if you wish to submit some comments.

As has been pointed out previously in these Newsletters, the Mayor has a major problem in meeting national and European air quality standards. This is not about reducing CO₂ emissions, but about meeting standards for such pollutants as particulates, NO₂, CO, etc.

But any such strategy certainly has an impact on transport because traffic is one of the major generators of such pollution so it's worth reviewing what the Mayor is saying, and proposing.

Background

As the Mayor points out, the former London smogs which killed thousands of people, and which were caused by industrial effluent and home coal fires have long since been banished. But air pollution is still a significant health hazard and makes some parts of London unpleasant to work or live in.

The main concerns now are particulates (PM₁₀s and PM_{2.5}s) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and although these declined in the 1990s, the levels have been stable since.

Although it is not stated in the report, the London Congestion Charge has of course had a negligible impact on these levels. Indeed much of the particulates are blown into London from outside the region (some 40% to 55%), and from as far away as the Sahara. The recent Icelandic ash emissions will have contributed also. It's also a truism that some of London's pollution blows into other parts of the South-East though.

Most particulate emissions are caused by road traffic, but other major factors are construction sites, and natural sources. Vehicle emissions are not just from engines, which have become a lot cleaner lately, but also from tyre and brake wear which have barely been tackled by regulation. Indeed for cars, the latter sources already exceed that from their engines.

It's worth pointing out that only 23% of PM10 emissions come from cars in central London, versus 20% from taxis (known to be generally much worse polluters than cars), and 17% from LGVs.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) tends to come from road transport and heating systems.

Other pollutants of interest are Benzene, 1,3 Butadiene, Carbon monoxide, Ozone, Lead and Sulphur dioxide although the latter two are at levels no longer considered a threat to human health.

The focus will be on reducing particulates and NO₂ as measures to reduce those will tend to have positive impacts on the others also.

The particulate levels in London are much worse than other UK cities because we have more traffic and traffic congestion, and hence are unlikely to meet EU regulations anytime soon. Other European cities have the same problem though.

The Blackspots

Pollution can be very localised and can be affected by other emitters than road traffic (e.g. London Heathrow airport affects pollution over a wide area). But particular roads where particulates are likely to be an on-going problem are:

Marylebone and Euston Roads, Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner, Victoria Embankment, Upper Thames Street and Tower Hill.

The picture below is of course of the road junction at Tower Hill taken from the home page of our web site.



What is Proposed?

The proposals to improve matters are:

1. Promoting modal shift to public transport with investment in rail/tube services and encouragement of walking and cycling.
2. Improving buses particularly by introducing hybrid motor power for all new buses.
3. Promoting electric vehicles with a target of 100,000 as soon as possible. Also converting GLA vehicles and encouraging car clubs to use hybrid and electric vehicles.
4. Continuing the London Low Emission Zone (and extending it to LGVs of course as planned) and continuing with the Congestion Charge Scheme (but as already pointed out, that will have no impact).
5. Improving road maintenance to reduce emissions from road surface wear.

There will also be a focus on priority measures at specific locations, such as those mentioned above where pollution is particularly bad.

Action Days & “No idling”

There will also be additional measures imposed on high pollution days, and to encourage “behavioural change”. Will we see bans on traffic on hot summer days, or usage only of cars on alternate days? It does not say because details are short.

In addition London will be made a “no idling” zone with a particular focus on “buses, coaches, taxis and delivery vehicles”. Taxi drivers beware – they already think they are persecuted by parking enforcement cameras so this could be a new revenue raiser for London boroughs. The plan also includes increasing the penalty for idling from a £20 fine to £120.

Tyre & Brake Emissions

The Mayor would like to see more European initiatives focussed on reducing tyre and brake emissions as these are now a large factor in particulate emissions.

They are also becoming more so as engine technology improves. Improved technology can probably reduce these emissions substantially if regulations supported it.

Local Blackspot Improvements

How to tackle the blackspots mentioned above, and others in London, is the question. The answers include:

1. Power washing road surfaces and applying dust suppressants. Might reduce PMs by 20%.
2. Improved cleaning of construction site delivery vehicles.
3. Deploy lower emission buses and taxis, and enforce “no-idling” of those in the vicinity.
4. Regular weekend closures to promote walking and cycling, e.g. on the Victoria Embankment (*Editors Comment: one of the main east-west thoroughfares across London which would be a major problem for traffic*).
5. Introducing speed over distance cameras on Park Lane and Victoria Embankment to smooth traffic flow, and reduce the speed limit on Park Lane to 30 mph (*Editors Comment: both totally unnecessary and unreasonable measures in my view*).

6. Looking at smoothing traffic flows by preventing vehicles from turning across traffic, changes to signal timings, better enforcement of red routes, etc.

7. Introducing green walls, green screens and low barriers, which might reduce emissions by 10%.

Taxis



Taxi drivers are also likely to be affected by the move to ban all such vehicles that are more than ten years old by 2015 (fifteen years old from 2012 and they must meet the Euro 5 standard by then).

Similar standards will also be imposed on all private hire vehicles, and both taxis and PHVs will be encouraged to be zero or reduced emission vehicles.

New concepts of taxi-ranks where the taxis don’t continually shuffle forward (and hence idle a lot) are required. (*Editor: Please submit your bright ideas on this one to the Mayor.*)

Summary Comments

Your editor’s overall comments on these plans are as follows. Whether electric vehicles will catch on remains to be seen. It really depends on whether people find them practical and economic, and acceptable to a wider audience than the few fanatic “early adopters” as at present. Unfortunately Boris’s plan does depend on them to some degree.

Measures to improve taxis and buses are welcomed, because these are two of the main contributors to pollution at present. Private cars are already less of a problem, and would be even less so if tyre and brake wear could be reduced. However HGVs seem to get off relatively lightly.

As regards local blackspots, I think more could be done to look at the traffic flows and other local conditions that are creating the difficulties. For example Lower Thames Street tends to be congested for often not very obvious reasons. Road works and adjacent building construction must have contributed significantly of late though.

I would be opposed to road closures and speed impositions as not likely to have significant impact on pollution, and the former can be enormously inconvenient for road users.

More details of the Draft Air Quality Strategy and how to submit your comments can be obtained from:

www.london.gov.uk/air-quality

Blackwall Tunnel Improvements



The north bound Blackwall Tunnel (originally built in 1897) is regularly rated as one of the most dangerous tunnels in Europe. Any accidents within the tunnel could quickly lead to a major disaster with no escape routes.

From the road accident statistics there are relatively few serious accidents within the tunnel, but safety improvements are currently being introduced. That includes additional lighting on the sharp bends which users will already have noticed. Other changes are new fire and incident detection systems, better access for emergency services, and a new CCTV camera system. See www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/archive/14005.aspx for details. Some weekend closures will be necessary to implement the improvements.

There's even a couple of public meetings on the 14th and 15th May to explain what they are doing in more detail. For more information see: www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/15296.aspx

Useful Webcams

For those who use the Blackwell Tunnel regularly (as your editor does), it's always worth looking at the following webcams before you start your journey to see how long the queues are (even a small incident in the middle of the day tends to create long queues for hours):

Southern Approach:

www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/webcams/440450.shtml

Sothern Approach - Woolwich Flyover:

www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/webcams/440347.shtml

Northern Approach:

www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/webcams/440323.shtml

A clip taken from the last of those web cams on a wet Sunday afternoon is shown on the left.

No Tolls

At least we have not heard any more lately about proposals to impose tolls on the Blackwall Tunnel. But John McGoldrick who runs the organisation called "National Alliance Against Tolls" has pointed out that most of the main parties standing for election have not made any commitment to reduce tolls. Indeed there is a tendency to suggest any new roads must be financed by them. Go to <http://notolls.org.uk/electionmanifestos2010.htm> for his analysis of the main parties views on transport policies. The National Alliance Against Tolls is an organisation well worth supporting if you oppose all kinds of road tolls including congestion charging.

Drivers Alliance & Election

The Drivers Alliance, another body worth supporting, also raised the question of a hung Parliament and the possible influence of the Liberal Democrats. In the same way that the Green Party had a major influence on Ken Livingstone's regime in London, by having a few seats in the GLA which could swing the vote on approval of his budgets, so could the LibDems have a major impact on the national Parliament.

They point out that the LibDems are keen on road pricing and they support cutting the road construction budget in favour of more investment in the rail network.

They also say that Lord Adonis, Transport Minister, was right in stating that LibDem policies were very close to those of the Labour Party.

(Editor's Comment: As at the time of writing however, the newly shining star of the LibDems after the performance of Nick Clegg in the TV debates is beginning to fade. Perhaps it is because the more one looks at the details of their policies, although some might seem attractive, others do not.)

How London Boroughs Work



In my new role advising the Chislehurst Society on transport matters, it was suggested I write an article explaining who has control of what in relation to transport and traffic issues in the local area. So it is given below and might help to explain how it works in the London Borough of Bromley (photo above is of a typical leafy street scene in Chislehurst). Many London boroughs will operate similar arrangements, though often with more or less democracy and public consultation.

Transport Issues in Chislehurst

I have written this article in an attempt to give our members some background information on some of the main issues and how they are governed and financed. This can be by the local borough, by London regional bodies, or by the national Government. This note may go some way to help you discover who to approach if you have a problem in this area (other than me of course).

How Are Policies Set?

Transport policies are set ultimately via the national Government, sometimes by specific legislation, sometimes by financial encouragement (or penalties), and sometimes simply by persuasion. So for example, some specific guidance is provided by Planning Law on many aspects such as maximum permitted parking provision for new developments and the general location of new developments (for example, major new retail stores should be in town centres with high levels of public transport “accessibility”). Below national policies there is a hierarchy of regional and local bodies that refine these policies into more detail. So in London, the Mayor of London (now Boris Johnson) develops a London Transport Strategy to which the local boroughs (such as Bromley) have to adhere.

Indeed Boris Johnson has just undertaken a public consultation on his revised Transport Strategy for London which will replace that written by his predecessor. But as the main executive body who created the document is Transport for London (TfL), whose staff were mainly appointed during Livingstone’s regime, you may not be surprised to learn that it shows substantial continuity of thinking.

The local boroughs have to come up with a Local Implementation Plan (LIP) that gives more detail and is consistent with the Mayor’s Plan – you can find the last one on the council’s web site, but it will need rewriting soon. It covers such matters as road safety initiatives, tackling traffic congestion, parking provision, coping with projected growth in transport demand, ensuring “sustainability” and protecting the environment.

In practice the Mayor of London now has enormous power and control over transport matters, and the local boroughs very little. So for example TfL control most major roads, the London Underground system, London Buses and Tramlink plus is bidding for control over surface trains in London. Indeed the Mayor also controls the purse-strings to a large extent.

Where Does the Money Come From?

Although local boroughs obviously raise funds from you directly via the local Council Tax, most of their money comes from central Government or via the Greater London Authority (i.e. TfL or other bodies). After they have paid for education and social services provision, there is very little of their own money which they are free to spend as they see fit. So most road safety schemes are funded by TfL, and the local boroughs have to “bid” for funds available under the London Mayor’s overall budget for road safety schemes. If the bids do not fit in with TfL policy, or are not seen as meritorious, they may not be supported at all.

Historically this has meant that boroughs often had schemes that they considered were very useful or important to local residents, but which could have been rejected by TfL. However the latest arrangements introduced by Boris Johnson give the local boroughs some funding over which they have discretion (£100,000 in Bromley only though this year).

It is important to emphasise that the local boroughs such as Bromley have very limited funds for “minor works” such as road junction improvements. If you want to get anything done, it probably has to fit in with the funds available for “road safety”, “bus priority schemes”, the “London Cycle Network”, or some other budget area devised by TfL. Let’s now have a look at how this works in some specific areas:

Road Safety

Road safety is a major concern to many, and in practice the local boroughs have responsibility for implementing improvements within overall targets set by the Mayor of London for accident reduction, and by local boroughs in their LIPs. In addition Bromley regularly publishes a “Road Safety Plan” that outlines the short term priorities. The boroughs still control most of the roads (other than major “distributor” roads controlled by TfL) and local traffic engineering staff develop the plans for improvements where action is perceived to be necessary.

When I first got involved in traffic issues in Bromley over 10 years ago, schemes were often put forward based on “who shouted loudest” or “buggin’s turn” (a list of requests was maintained and it depended on who was top of the list). This was not cost effective. More recently the choice of schemes is based on the statistics of where most accidents have occurred (weighted to give priority to fatal and serious accidents). The effectiveness of different possible schemes is then measured based on estimates of accident savings, the “cost” of a life or a serious injury (yes – there are published figures by the Department for Transport of both), and a decision is made then on whether they are worth doing at all. This is of course rather a technical process not easily understood by the layman, but it does mean that in theory the most cost-effective schemes are adopted, and those less effective are not. This is very important, because with limited funds available, it is important to spend the money in the most effective way!

But the result is that you may have a concern about speeding traffic in a road, but the council will do nothing if the actual accident statistics show it is not cost effective to do so. Likewise, politicians often come up with all kind of ideas to improve road safety, but they are likely to get a sceptical reception from council or TfL staff if there is no obvious proof of such a proposal reducing accidents in a cost-effective manner.

The only slight hitch in the above scenario of late is that the council have now tackled all the obvious road accident black spots, based on historic accident data and hence may have to look at schemes that solve problems over a wider area.

Incidentally the council does hold data on all personal injury accidents because they receive copies of the STATS19 reports made by the police and maintain a database of such data. This is should be available upon request (and you can always use the Freedom of Information Act of course if you have any difficulties in obtaining this and other council held information - with a few exceptions).

Traffic Congestion

Concerns about traffic congestion always rate highly whenever residents of Chislehurst, Bromley, London or the UK are surveyed. What can the local boroughs do about it? Not a lot in essence, because major new road building in London would be very difficult (and any road building was pretty well banned by Ken Livingstone). There is no separate budget for “road improvements to reduce congestion”. However, the boroughs (and the Mayor/TfL) can encourage “modal shift” (ie. use of public transport, cycling and walking – the latter two being good for our health also of course). They can invest in better public transport systems, more information to help people use them, and measures to improve the reliability and speed of public transport such as bus lanes and adjusting bus stops and kerb lines to ensure they are not blocked.

But all is not lost perhaps. Local boroughs have a responsibility under the Traffic Management Act to tackle congestion and improve traffic flows, and their policies in that area will be defined in the LIP. There should also be a member of the council’s staff who is nominated as the “Traffic Manager”. They can tackle problems at junctions, or look at issues such as traffic light timing, but of course there may be difficulty with funding any significant measures for the reasons given above. In reality the Government imposed a duty on local boroughs to tackle the issue, and put in place bureaucracy to support it, but with no powers or funds to do anything of significance!

The Role of Councillors

You may be wondering what is the role of your local ward councillors and other Borough leaders and council staff in all this? Taking road safety schemes as an example, staff in the Environment Department of Bromley Council will produce proposals embodied in reports which are submitted to Councillor Colin Smith who holds the “Environment Portfolio” (one of the cabinet under the “Leader” and “Cabinet” system of Local Government now used). If he approves the proposal, then it can go before a “Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee for review and/or confirmation.

Any members of the public can attend the latter’s meetings and ask questions if they care to do so. Both Mr Smith and the PDS Committee will consult local ward councillors and the latter can of course raise new issues with Mr Smith at any time. So it is always worth talking to your local ward councillors in Chislehurst if you have a transport issue. Any significant proposals are also put out to public consultation by means of public notices in the press, the circulation of leaflets, etc.

This system seems to generally work reasonably well in recent years in Bromley, with good consultation and public involvement. Council reports on such matters are available on their web site, or otherwise on demand, and Bromley council staff are always helpful in supplying information in my experience even if you may be critical of their latest proposals. But the system does depend on having a sensible person with some knowledge of the area in the position of “Portfolio Holder”. Road safety issues can be particularly contentious with people becoming quite heated on the subject so reconciling conflicting views or explaining why the council takes a certain stance is not always easy. Mr Smith’s role is therefore not always an easy one.

Parking and Traffic Enforcement

One area where the local borough still has a substantial say is in parking regulation and traffic enforcement. It is also of course a substantial source of revenue for the council from parking fees in council controlled car parks, on-street parking meters, and from enforcement fines – the latter are run by the council rather than the police as they are now “decriminalised” offences. Which areas have parking limitations, such as being marked by yellow lines, or the extent of wider “permit parking” schemes, are determined by the council via the above process. Likewise some “moving traffic offences” such as driving in bus lanes are now enforced by the local authority.

There is a move to have more consistency in parking regulations and the “viciousness” of enforcement across London as it can vary substantially from borough to borough. Bromley seems to be as fair as most, but there are some issues about use of bus lane and parking cameras that cause regular complaints to me.

Freedom Pass

It's worth saying something about the Freedom Pass – the free travel concession for those over 60 that many of us rely on in London. This is often seen as a “free gift” laid on by the former Mayor, but in reality the local boroughs pay for the cost based on usage. As the population ages and more people take up the concession, and as Transport for London and other bodies raise the fares (typically faster than inflation), the costs have been going up at a rapid rate. This has caused major pressure on local borough budgets. Although local councillors would like to keep your local taxes down, they have little control over this, or many other costs imposed on the local borough.

Conclusion

I hope this article has provided a simple overview of how the system works and who is responsible for what. With Boris Johnson having some difficulties with his budget for Transport for London, it is likely that TfL funding of schemes will be cut back in the same way that their staff have been. This has also resulted in bus fares being raised and services being reduced – one of the major problems in London is the massive subsidies on bus usage that grew up during Livingstone's time as Mayor which we all have to pay for one way or another. But that subject is beyond the scope of this brief article.

I have avoided comment on particular policies, or what might be improved, as they might be contentious issues that would require some lengthy explanations. But it is important to understand that transport issues are often part of a network of interacting policies and problems. Solving one problem can create difficulties in other areas very easily.

Roger W. Lawson, February 2010

Postscript to the above

Chislehurst High Street is one of the roads in the borough that would be an attractive street if it was not for the parked cars and stationary traffic – congested in reality for most of the day.

Your editor, along with others, has recently advocated removal of traffic lights, removal of some parking, a 20-mph zone and a “shared space” scheme as the solution to these problems. Yes, I am keen on “environmental improvements” which are the main focus of the Chislehurst Society, if they can be combined with improvements to traffic flows as I expect would result from these proposals. Traffic congestion is of course a continuing concern of Chislehurst Society members.

Parking in Croydon



Peter Morgan is an active ABD member who lives in Croydon. The following is an article by him on parking over Easter in the borough.

A number of shoppers in Coulsdon had their Easter spoilt by Croydon Council's parking police as they pounced on Good Friday morning.

There may have been parades to the church to commemorate cruel punishment of someone who broke the harsh laws of the time, but Croydon Council follows in the Roman's footsteps by sending in its wardens to extract their pound of flesh from the unsuspecting public.

This follows the scandal of the free parking in Coulsdon at Christmas - which was only free to those with an ear for the council.

Photo above shows one such PCN issued on Good Friday. I saw several people being fined - one in the Avenue, and at least 3 in Malcolm Road.

It seems the council not only say their new Pay & Display meters apply on all public holidays, but they are determined to issue penalties to anyone who slips up. I ask why these rules apply when most shops in Coulsdon are shut?

I also ask why the council is so determined to stamp its authority on the public and spoil the holiday period like this? Does the council really want to send out the message "Don't come to Coulsdon, we don't want you here"?

News Snapshots

Sundry news in the last few weeks that is worth a mention is as follows:

+ An interesting article in the Financial Times reported on "accidental deaths by cause" for 1854-1861 as originally noted by Guys Hospital. Falls from heights (presumably by construction workers) and deaths from clothes catching fire (mainly women) exceeded those of "collisions with street vehicles". The latter were 62 in total and presumably referred to accidents involving trams, horse drawn buses and other carriages. The next highest figures were 46 from "fall of heavy weights" and 29 for "railway accidents". As always, transport tends to be a source of accidents.

+ A review of traffic congestion in the West End (Oxford St/Regent St particularly) from the London Assembly concluded that a shuttle bus should replace the major bus routes running along Oxford Street, and that Bond St to Oxford Circus be pedestrianised (see last newsletter for some related comments on this problem area).

+ Boris Johnson now apparently does not intend to reinstate the Blackwall Tunnel tidal flow system. His election manifesto suggested he would try to do so.

+ Proposals to charge for parking in Richmond Park (probably £1 per hour) brought out about 1,000 people to demonstrate against it.

+ The use of Greenwich Park as the Olympics equestrian venue continues to attract opposition from park users and surrounding residents. But the planning application was given the go-ahead by Greenwich council.

+ TfL have identified 140 traffic signals in London that could be removed. Twenty-eight have already gone. TfL is also trialling "countdown" signals that warn pedestrians how many seconds they have left before the lights change. TfL are now blaming the slow down in general traffic speeds since the congestion charge zone was introduced on additional traffic lights rather than the other factors previously blamed.

+ Motorists have paid TfL £80 million in parking fines in the last five years according to the RAC. The proliferation of CCTV use for parking enforcements means that fines from the latter now exceed those issued by parking wardens.

+ The London Motorists Action Group and Drivers Alliance have launched a "Manifesto for Parking and Traffic Enforcement". It's more than just a manifesto but a very complete analysis with what is wrong with parking control and enforcement. Well worth a read and the Motorist Legal Challenge Fund is asking for donations to help support some legal challenges to the existing arrangements. Go to the following for more details:

www.lmag.org.uk/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=313

About The Association of British Drivers (ABD)

The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Association is a "not for profit" voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our web site at www.abd.org.uk

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the London Region of the Association of British Drivers (A.B.D.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB and is distributed free of charge to ABD Members in the London area and to those Members of BBRAG who formerly received the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group newsletter. All material contained herein is Copyright of the A.B.D. or of the authors and may only be reproduced with permission. Any opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author of the article or that of the Editor which do not necessarily represent the official policies of the A.B.D.

A.B.D. London Region Co-ordinator and Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com). Contact the above for information on the aims and objectives of the A.B.D. or for membership information (membership costs £25.00 per annum if paid by cheque, debit or credit card; or £20.00 if paid by standing order (however there is an additional charge of £5 if you wish to receive the ABD national newsletter on paper rather than electronically). The A.B.D. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in London. Complimentary subscriptions to this newsletter are available on request to elected politicians or those with a professional interest in transport matters.

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Note that the ABD maintains a list of members who are familiar with individual London boroughs and may be able to help with information on local issues in those boroughs. The current list is below. If any members would like to keep an eye on local news and advise on local transport issues then please let me know. Roger Lawson

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